



# **IOWA OUTDOORS**

**Iowa Department of Natural Resources**  
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*[Hold this story until March 29]*

## **BRING ON THE TROUT**

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

We may be just a few weeks removed from massive snow drifts and freezing rain, but spring has *officially* arrived in Iowa. For many anglers, the spring season doesn't start until they see something more tangible...like the hatchery truck rolling up to their favorite trout stream.

There are 50 some streams throughout northeast Iowa which hold trout year-round, but those fish are ultra angler-wary through the winter. That's why they haven't been caught yet. And that's why most trout anglers cross off the days until April 1; the target date for Iowa's three hatcheries to load up and meet that pent up demand. Actually, weather permitting, the first stocking will be Saturday, March 31 on two streams.

"We'll stock approximately 350,000 catchable sized fish this year," says Dave Marolf, Manchester hatchery manager for the Department of Natural Resources. "That's about a 90:10 split between rainbow trout and brook trout. We'd eventually like to get that ratio to 80:20."

That marks a significant change in the trout program. Catchable brown trout have been a staple for years. Now, though, natural reproduction and improved growth have proven sufficient for brown trout. Future keepers will come from fingerling stockings from the hatcheries and naturally occurring brown trout. "We have seen our wild brown trout populations flourish over the last decade," underscores Marolf. "We now have over

100 miles of trout water with good enough conditions (habitat, water quality, temperature, food sources) to support brown trout.”

Those rainbow trout going into the streams this spring will be about 13 to 14 months old; spawned at mid-winter 2006, and raised since then under watchful hatchery eyes. All hatchery trout are spawned at Manchester, with fish being shipped to rearing stations in Decorah and Big Spring (near Elkader) at various points in their development. Each of the three facilities stocks catchable sized (about a half-pound now, heavier toward the end of the season) trout at the streams closest, throughout the nine northeast counties in Iowa’s ‘Trout Country.’ That labor/facility/feed-intensive program is provided through the \$11 trout fee paid by anglers who fish for trout (\$13 for nonresidents) each year.

Depending on the angler pressure, streams are stocked from twice a week to twice a month. They offer you just about any degree of difficulty desired; from ‘curbside’ pools where you can see trout from your vehicle...to bluff country hiking and trout so spooky that they disappear when ever your shadow falls across the water.

On many streams, it’s not hard to take home a limit of five freshly-stocked rainbows; providing you get there early and don’t mind a crowd. That’s pretty much a situation created by geography. Most streams in the southern ‘tier’ of trout territory; in Dubuque, Jackson, Delaware and maybe southern Fayette counties, are within an hour or so from Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, the Quad Cities, Waterloo, and Dubuque. There are simply more anglers, coming out more often to those nearby streams.

However, you can also wade into a backcountry setting and increase the challenge by getting away from the crowds. The best way to get there? ‘Go North!’

As the trucks leave the hatcheries, the hatchery workers know how many fish they have on board. As they drop fish along the stream, they are also counting heads; to determine how many anglers were seen. “If you have the time, it is worth your effort to drive further north, closer to Minnesota,” suggests Marolf. “We stock maybe 10 to 12 trout per angler seen around Manchester, for instance. “It’s closer to 20, 25 per angler up north.” Though acknowledging that fuel prices and time constraints might work against that strategy, Marolf says the *quality* is hard to beat. “Some of Iowa’s better and bigger streams are in the northern counties. There’s a better wild population of trout, too.”

Your best prospects might even mix the two extremes. A dozen or so streams are stocked on an ‘unannounced basis.’ In Delaware County, for instance Twin Bridges Park lies along well-traveled Highway 3, yet—as an ‘unannounced’ stream--gets only a small fraction of the ‘announced’ stocking day traffic on the gravel roads leading to Fountain Spring Park, just a mile or two southwest. Several others, Little Turkey, Grannis, Upper Swiss Valley among them, are either ‘unannounced’ or just require a noticeable hike past the easy access anglers to get to some great holes.

## **TROUT GUIDE/ONLINE INFO**

You can reach those lesser-known streams with a copy of Iowa's Trout Guide in your fishing vest. It gives locations of all trout streams, as well rules for fishing private property, tips for catching trout, artificial lure-only streams, catch-and-release stretches or other special regulations and other information. The Trout Guide is being updated and reprinted this year. Guides are available at DNR locations in northeast Iowa, as well as retail fishing outlets in or near the area, too. Most of the trout information, including a Manchester stocking schedule are also available on line at [www.iowadnr.gov](http://www.iowadnr.gov), click on Fishing, then Trout Stocking.

## **URBAN STOCKING CONCLUDES**

While most trout anglers are just breaking out their gear for the season, the state's urban trout program is winding down its stocking season.

Catchable sized trout will go into the south lake at Sommerset State Park, Thursday, March 29, south of Des Moines. In Sioux City's Bacon Creek, the last stocking of the season will be Friday, March 30. In Cedar Falls the next day, March 31, North Prairie Lake gets its last supplement of trout.

Those urban locations allow anglers from across the state to try their hand at trout fishing, without having to make the drive all the way to the nine northeast Iowa counties, which support year-round trout populations. Trout thrive in cold water, which opens up the urban fisheries in the winter. Warmer water through the rest of the year, though, severely reduces trout survival.

**For more information, contact Dave Marolf, manager, Manchester trout hatchery, at 563-927-3276.**

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## **SEARCH FOR HIDDEN TREASURES AND BEAUTIFY BRUSHY CREEK**

LEHIGH - Brushy Creek State Recreation Area is hosting a Cache In – Trash Out (CITO) event and an Equestrian CITO on April 21. Both events will begin at 9 a.m., from the south day use area, west of the south campground and are free to the public. The event ends at 4 p.m.

The CITO event combines using GPS units to search for hidden treasures while picking up trash along the way. The event is open to everyone, regardless of age or GPS navigation ability. Participants should plan to bring gloves, GPS unit and data cable (if

you have one), comfortable attire/shoes, and a water bottle. Garbage bags will be provided.

“At base camp, we will explain geo-caching to those new to the sport, provide the rules and coordinates for the day,” said Erin Meehan, shared naturalist with Webster County Conservation Board. “We have a few GPS units available for checkout, if needed.”

If planning to check out a GPS unit, bring a valid driver’s license or other form of identification. Units are available first come, first serve. This is a come and go type of event.

A potluck dinner will be held at home base following the event at 5 p.m. If planning to attend the potluck, please bring something to share, table service (plate, fork etc.), and blanket/chairs. A few picnic tables will be available. Hotdogs, condiments and water will be provided.

Camping is available. The north campground has 125 sites, the south campground has 105 sites, and the non-equestrian campground has 47 sites. Advanced campsite reservation is available at [www.reserveiaparks.com](http://www.reserveiaparks.com).

If planning to attend, RSVP by calling 515-576-4258. The day will be filled with new experiences, new friendships and new adventures. The equestrian CITO will be cancelled due to rain in order to protect the trails.

**For more information, call 515-576-4258.**

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## **PRAIRIE CHICKEN DAY APRIL 14 AT KELLERTON BCA**

KELLERTON – The public is invited to view prairie chickens annual spring ritual on April 14, at the Kellerton Bird Conservation Area, southwest of Kellerton in Ringgold County.

“We will meet at 6 a.m. in order to watch the prairie chickens when they are most active and vocal,” said Chad Paup, wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. Prairie chickens will showcase their unique mating ritual for only a few hours, before dispersing for the day.

The event will take place rain or shine.

**For more information, contact Paup at 641-464-2220.**

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## **NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTORS TO CHICKADEE CHECK-OFF FALLING**

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Heading toward the home stretch of the income tax season, we are juggling itemized deductions, interest statements, receipts and all the other paper and electronic data needed to fill out our 1040s.

Tucked away on that state form, though, is the sometimes-forgotten Fish and Wildlife Fund check-off, which provides a boost for those often-forgotten wildlife species in Iowa. A boost, that is, as long as some of us kick in a few dollars. In the last few years, donors have faded. And with new IRS rules on the horizon, that slide could continue.

"People are familiar with bald eagles and trumpeter swans; the big 'showy' creatures," acknowledges Doug Harr, wildlife diversity coordinator for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. "However, we have about 550 other species of non-game wildlife out there, that get very little attention. We do all sorts of research and inventory work, trying to get a handle on those lesser known species."

Hunters and anglers pay for their recreation through license fees and excise taxes. That keeps those fish and game populations and habitat in relatively good shape. It is the non-game species that lean heavily on the check-off; found on line 15 on your short form 1040...or line 59a on the long form. About \$140,000 year is generated now, down about 10 percent from the years before. "We really need to get the message out; about how important this is," stresses Harr. "Only one to two percent of taxpayers contribute. If we could get more people to step up, it would make a significant difference." However, the deck seems stacked against on several fronts.

First, there are four check-offs on the tax form, each a reasonable candidate for a donation. "People who do contribute only give to one (of the four). It seems to be the (outdoor) background they have, in deciding whether to contribute (to the Fish and Wildlife Fund)," explains an accountant from an Iowa City area tax preparation office. She asked that her name not be used. Second, the check-off doesn't get much promotion. Customers in her office fill out a questionnaire, ahead of their appointment. If they list the check-off, she brings it up. Otherwise, it isn't mentioned. "I've seen fewer (contribute) in the last 10 years," she offered--not surprisingly.

Another tax preparer, from a nationally known company doesn't even go that far. "Some people donate. We leave it up to them. We don't ask. Most people give (donations) in the normal method." I assume he meant direct contributions. He didn't

want his name used, either. Tax preparers sure seem shy at tax time. At least with electronic filing, you have to scroll past the line item and make a decision.

Third, IRS rules will tighten future contributions; requiring a copy of your check or some other receipt to declare your gift at income tax time. "I'm not sure how we might be affected by that," admits Harr, who notes that most check-off contributions are relatively small; five to ten dollars. "It might be a concern for larger donors," he concedes. "Though, I would think a copy of the previous year's tax form would suffice as a receipt." Tax preparer 'A' from the local tax office agrees with Harr.

While the accountants sort it out, the work goes on. The DNR's wildlife diversity program has other sources of funding, but the check-off is a lifeline. It is a major reason there will be a major push to learn more about amphibians and reptiles in east central and southeast Iowa in the next couple years. Those less visible, creepy, crawly critters are much more sensitive to ecological changes than most of those 'showy' creatures that get all the publicity.

That's why biologists will be conducting surveys in the watersheds around the lower Iowa and Cedar rivers and where they spill into the Mississippi River, with hopes of establishing an Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Area. "That area has Iowa's highest diversity of amphibians and reptiles. It's similar design to our Bird Conservation Areas," explains wildlife diversity biologist Karen Kinkead. "We will eventually assemble an inventory and work with landowner incentives; expertise and dollars for habitat improvement."

Kinkead says about 12-percent of that land is already in some sort of permanent protective status. That's work that can move forward with the check-off. Without it, the effort to learn more about the cricket frog, small-mouthed salamander, worm snake and Blanding's turtle could become as endangered as the species it seeks to protect.

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## **STATE PRESERVES BOARD TO MEET APRIL 6 AT FORT ATKINSON**

DES MOINES – The State Preserves Advisory Board will meet at 8:30 a.m., April 6, at the Fort Atkinson Public Library, 302 3<sup>rd</sup> Street NW, in Fort Atkinson.

The board will tour Fort Atkinson and Saint James Lutheran Church state preserves at 1 p.m., on April 5. The meeting and tour is open to the public.

Members of the State Preserves Advisory Board are Deborah Lewis, Carl Kurtz, Laura Jackson, Scott Moats, Armando Rosales, Cynthia Peterson and Liz Christiansen, deputy director of the DNR

A more detailed agenda is available on the Iowa DNR's website [www.iowadnr.gov](http://www.iowadnr.gov) under State Parks / Preserves, then click on Preserves Advisory Board link.

The following is the meeting agenda.

- Approve Agenda
- Approve Minutes of January Meeting
- Preserve Managers Conference Update
- Request for Permission to Conduct Research
- Bixby State Preserve
- Proposal Selections for Fiscal Year 2008
- Election of Chair
- Open Discussion

**For more information, contact Daryl Howell at 515-281-8524.**

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## **CREATE A SONGBIRD FEAST**

Songbird lovers can supercharge their feeding program by planting beautiful trees and shrubs, which not only provides food, but also year around shelter for our feathered friends.

"Urban and rural yards can provide important habitat for many species of songbirds, and greatly strengthen your bird feeding program," said John Walkowiak, chief of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources forestry bureau. "Now is the time to order songbird packets for spring planting. It will make the birds happy, and your yard more beautiful."

For only \$20 and a few hours work, you can plant trees and shrubs that will help feed and shelter songbirds for your lifetime, he said. The Songbird packet contains 16 native shrubs and four trees that are proven to be attractive to songbirds year around. These are all grown in Iowa by the DNR State Forest Nursery in Ames from seed collected right here in Iowa and recommended by Iowa Audubon.

The Songbird packet consists of two bur oak trees, two white pine trees, four wild plum bushes, four chokecherry bushes, four gray dogwood bushes and four serviceberry bushes. The trees and shrubs average 16 to 20 inches tall and are bareroot plants. The songbird packet can easily fit into a small city lot or backyard, and will help beautify the neighborhood.

Songbird packets make great gifts friends and relatives, as the State Forest Nursery provides gift certificates for those special friends who will receive their trees and shrubs this spring.

Ordering is easy, just call 1-800-865-2477 and ask for the Songbird Packet. Checks, VISA or Master Card are accepted. Shipping is free. The Songbird packet will be shipped directly this coming spring season (now through May), along with detailed planting instructions. Go to [www.iowadnr.gov](http://www.iowadnr.gov) for more information or to order on line.

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